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BRIEFS ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM

1957

- II -

New Information on Khrushchev's

Attack on Stalin at 20th CPSU

Congress

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SUBJECT: New Information on Khrushchev's Attack on Stalin at 20th CPSU Congress

1. The following information was received from a highly sensitive source:

a. Circumstances of Khrushchev's secret speech on Stalin.

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[REDACTED] who claims to have received his information from Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev, recently offered the following explanation of developments at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), held in Moscow in February 1956. When the Congress convened, the Soviet leaders had no intention of admitting that Stalin had been responsible for numerous crimes. They realized that there was considerable dissension throughout the Soviet Union as a result of Stalin's policies. However, they hoped that over a period of time discontent would gradually disappear. During the Congress, several altercations arose among the delegates, many of whom accused one another of being responsible for the murder or the disappearance of the Soviet officials who had been purged during Stalin's regime. The delegates insisted that the leaders of the CPSU provide a complete explanation of what had transpired under Stalin's rule. The situation became so tense that the Congress was temporarily adjourned, and the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU met in an all-night session to decide what action should be taken. A majority finally decided that a report of Stalin's crimes should be made to the delegates. Khrushchev predicted that such a report would give rise to numerous difficulties. He was selected to deliver the report, because a number of his subordinates had been the victims of Stalin's atrocities. It was, therefore, believed that the delegates would feel that he was sympathetic to their complaints.

b. Existence of a second speech on Stalin's foreign policy.

In addition to this report on Stalin's crimes, which was later made public, Khrushchev delivered another secret report to high-ranking officials of the CPSU, the USSR Foreign Ministry, and the Soviet intelligence agencies. The second report, which dealt with the errors in Soviet foreign policy, has not yet been made public.

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2. Concerning the decision to make the special report on Stalin. The information in 1. a. above checks with reports received from other sources on the circumstances of the secret Khrushchev speech on Stalin on the night of 24-25 February 1956.

- a. It was reliably reported that General Secretary Gollan of CP Great Britain was told by Soviet leader Ponomarev during the period late May-early July that the decision to make the Khrushchev attack was not taken until the Congress was already in session; that the release of Stalin purges prior to the Congress had stimulated pressure for further investigations; that during the Congress, the delegates had expressed dissatisfaction with the adequacy of the open-session speeches by Khrushchev and Mikoyan; and therefore, the Central Committee had made an "emergency decision" that Khrushchev should make a special report on Stalin.
- b. The leading Secretary of the Belgian CP, Ernest Burnelle, following his visit to Moscow, reported to Party members that the open criticisms of Stalin at the 20th CPSU Congress had caused so much surprise and emotion it was then decided to give the secret report on Stalin. According to Burnelle, the Khrushchev speech had not been drafted prior to the Congress, and was an improvised presentation of data designed to show that the open criticisms of Stalin were well-founded.
- c. In addition, Dutch Party leader Paul De Groot has stated that, in his opinion, the open attack had been launched by Mikoyan without Khrushchev's consent, or that Khrushchev was consulted, but did not realize the consequences. According to De Groot, the Mikoyan speech caused such a stir that the delegates forced Khrushchev to deliver his closed-session attack on Stalin. Whether De Groot deduced this on his own or was so advised by the Soviets is not known.

3. Ambassador Bohlen has reconstructed the circumstances in a similar manner:

- a. The general decision to launch a frontal attack on Stalin was made well in advance of the 20th Congress.
- b. But the Khrushchev special report itself may not have been planned in advance.

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"It may well be," Bohlen observed, "that although the Party leadership thought that the generalized criticism of Stalin by Khrushchev in his report to the Central Committee, and the somewhat sharper attacks by Mikoyan and Pankratova, would be sufficient to lay the foundation for the necessary revision of Soviet writings, the delegates to the Party Congress were not satisfied with these explanations and that further justification for the dethronement of Stalin was considered necessary."

4. Other circumstantial indicators that the Khrushchev speech was hastily drafted, possibly while the 20th Congress was in session, as the non-Soviet CPs have been told, include the following:

- a. The first part of the speech is painstakingly documented; the latter portion is less so.
- b. Khrushchev, in the speech, said: "Not long ago, only several days before the present congress, we...interrogated the investigative judge Rodos..." (Underlining supplied.)
- c. As the foreign CPs complained, the speech was notably devoid of an adequate "Marxist analysis" of the reasons for Stalin's rise and reign. This "explanation" was not produced until 30 June. A well thought-out attack would have at least made an effort to give it a decent foundation. The numerous holes in the Khrushchev story, which Communists and non-Communists outside the Bloc have pointed out, also mark it as a hastily prepared document.

5. The existence of a second secret Khrushchev report is plausible. The information set out in paragraph 1, b, concerning a second secret report by Khrushchev on Stalin's "errors" in foreign policy is plausible. Most observers noted the relative lack of treatment of Soviet foreign policy in the version of the report which has been publicized.